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The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

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7 October 1983

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

THROUGH : National Intelligence Officer/USSR-EE

FROM : []
Assistant National Intelligence Officer/USSR-EE

SUBJECT : A Speculative Look at Possible Political Repercussions of
the KAL Downing

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1. Although Moscow has so far maintained a facade of unity in the wake of the KAL downing, it is possible that Andropov could eventually make one or more of his opponents pay the price for the imbroglio, his purpose being to recoup some Soviet losses while simultaneously using the situation to his domestic political advantage. If so, three men seem particularly vulnerable: Foreign Minister Gromyko, Chief of the International Information Department Zamyatin, and Chief of Air Defense Forces Marshal Koldunov.

2. There has already been an apparently calculated leak to a Western reporter in Moscow about alleged firings in the Soviet Air Defense Forces. This leak suggests that the Soviets:

- Realize that the downing of the Korean airliner and the unconvincing Soviet explanations for it have been self-inflicted blows to Soviet interests.
- Would like the West to believe that the downing was a mistake (I believe this was the case -- but only to the extent that the tragedy resulted not from a conscious decision to shoot down an airliner; rather, it was caused by an operating philosophy fully endorsed by Andropov and the rest of the Politburo -- which dictates that it is better to kill countless innocents rather than let one suspect escape).

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- Hope this leak will refurbish Andropov's tarnished reputation as a man of peace faced with the difficult task of straightening out a powerful and uncooperative bureaucracy.

The alleged firings, therefore, could be but the beginning of a process to undo some of the international political damage by fixing the blame on some more politically significant scapegoats.

3. Such a development would be a seeming departure from the present Soviet approach. Up to now the leadership has seemed most determined to assure the domestic audience of the rectitude of the regime's actions and, by implication, of its unity, omniscience, and omnipotence. Firings might blemish this self-portrayal. But they might also be handled in such a way as to veil the truth from the Soviet people by publicly disguising the motivations for dismissals while providing self-serving leaks to Westerners. Equally important, regime unity may have been more contrived than real and, in any case, need not be permanent. Indeed, there are indications that no one is eager to associate himself wholeheartedly with any aspect of the affair:

- Andropov's first and, so far, only comments came almost a month after the event and were limited to two paragraphs. Although associating himself explicitly with the Soviet "elucidation" of the "US provocation", he said nothing about the Soviet handling of the affair and thereby seemed to leave his options open.
- None of the standard publicized reports of Politburo meetings since the downing have made any reference to it. Even more eye catching has been the Politburo's conspicuous failure to voice approval of Gromyko's trip to Madrid and Paris, approval that is now given in ritual fashion to all Soviet leadership meetings with high-level foreign government officials.
- The decision to have the Soviet Foreign Minister absent himself from the UN General Assembly for the first time in 27 years suggests a sense of vulnerability and indecision about the line to take in the wake of Gromyko's ineffective efforts in Madrid. Interestingly, this decision, which was seemingly taken overnight in response to the banning of Soviet aircraft from a New York civilian airport, had been preceded several days earlier by a Soviet demand that the US guarantee Gromyko's safety. In retrospect, that request may have been intended to lay the groundwork for the cancellation of the trip, the airport closure then serving as a convenient public rationale for a decision made earlier. If so, this would be another indication of high-level perplexity about what to do.

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- There have been no public references to or statements by the Commander of Soviet Air Defense Forces, Marshal Koldunov, since the downing. Explanations have been handled either by his superior-Marshal Ogarkov-or by his subordinates.
 - Two Soviet publicists in the UK for a meeting criticized the military's handling of the shoot down. The more junior stated that the Soviet pilots had been made triggerhappy by extensive US reconnaissance activities. The more important of the two -- the editor of PRAVDA, Afanasyev -- faulted the military for not providing either comprehensive or very accurate information immediately after the downing. Taken together, these comments suggest either the dismay of propagandists at the damage done to their image-building efforts or a decision made at a fairly high level in Moscow to deflect Western criticisms in the direction of the military.
4. All in all, then, there are enough indications of Soviet unease about the downing and of apparent individual feelings of vulnerability to warrant an examination of potential political victims -- that is, those whose removal is justifiable in terms of their involvement in the affair, possible by virtue of existing political alignments, and expedient for the ruling elite.
5. In looking for potential political victims it seems logical to divide the affair into three stages: the downing itself, the rendering of the post-action military account to the political leadership, and the political leadership's handling of the aftermath.
- The Downing. Since the military's handling of the KAL intrusion seems to have betrayed considerable confusion at all levels, culpability does not necessarily lie with whoever gave the shoot down order. Rather, potential derelicts range from regional military authorities all the way to the Chief of the General Staff, Ogarkov. Leaving aside radar operators and those allegedly dismissed so far, the most politically significant victim seems to be Koldunov: It is his forces which were responsible for the downing. His removal would be easy to effect and, with the help of Soviets news manipulation, would probably attract more attention in the West than in the Soviet Union as a whole. In addition, his dismissal would underline to Soviet air defense personnel the importance of proper identification.

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- The Rendering of the Post-Action Military Report to the Political Authority. Ustinov, Ogarkov and Koldunov could be held responsible if it were found that the initial account was neither prompt nor accurate enough. Dislodging Ustinov would have to be initiated personally by Andropov, who seems to have neither the power nor the incentive to make this move. Going after Ogarkov would seem to be self-defeating since it would pin-point as blameworthy the man whom the regime has chosen to defend the rectitude of its actions. Thus, in this situation also, we are left with Koldunov as a potential victim. Indeed, Ogarkov may have intended to ensure that any subsequent blame be limited to the Air Defense Forces by parrying a question about General Staff involvement in the affair.
- Propaganda Handling of the Downing. There are three possible victims: Stukalin, (head of the Central Committee Propaganda Department), Zamyatin (head of the International Information Department), and Gromyko.
 - Stukalin was probably responsible for the domestic handling of the situation, the sole sphere in which the leadership does not seem to have reason for dissatisfaction. Additionally, Stukalin was appointed to his position under Andropov and therefore presumably enjoys the latter's protection. He does not seem vulnerable.
 - Gromyko and Zamyatin are primarily responsible for the international handling of the downing, which, simply put, has made the matter worse instead of better. Quite apart from the substance of the Soviet arguments, Zamyatin lost points at the press conference by his emotional behavior. Interestingly, shortly after Andropov's accession, it was rumored that Zamyatin would lose his job and his department would be abolished. Although both have survived, these rumors suggest at least some initial uncertainty as to where he stood with the new leadership. If his ouster had indeed been contemplated earlier, his questionable performance in the wake of the downing could now give additional justification for his removal.
 - Gromyko's case is more important and more complicated. All initial reporting on Andropov's accession to power indicated that Ustinov and Gromyko were Andropov's strongest supporters. Subsequent reporting on Ustinov has continued in this vein but reporting on Gromyko has been contradictory, with some reports suggesting that Andropov was unhappy with him. For instance, after a meeting with a foreign delegation at which Gromyko chose to amplify Andropov's remarks, the latter is supposed to have remarked that "Gromyko must always have his say." Additionally, there were also rumors late in 1982 that Gromyko would be eased out of his Foreign Ministry

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post. In the event, Gromyko not only retained his ministry but was made First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers, a promotion whose import is still unclear and which could have been part of a failed attempt to end his day-to-day control of Soviet diplomacy. If that is the case or if bad blood has indeed developed between Gromyko and Andropov, the KAL affair provides ammunition which could be used against him. At Madrid, he seems to have made a bad situation worse by gratuitously suggesting that the Soviets would do it again if faced with another intruder and behaving atrociously with Secretary Shultz. A change in the Foreign Ministry probably would also benefit Andropov domestically by putting into that position, and presumably the Politburo, an official indebted to Andropov for his elevation. Gromyko and Zamyatin thus seem to be possible political victims.

6. There is another possibility. As the top leader, Andropov bears ultimate responsibility for all aspects of Soviet policy. Could the KAL imbroglio be used against him? Did his directives to the military allow the downing to happen? Why has he not taken more energetic command of the situation? No matter what his actual role or motivations, he could be certainly faulted for this Soviet political setback. But Andropov seems to fall in the category of those who are guilty but untouchable by virtue of their political power. Unless we are unaware of a dramatic shift of power within the Politburo, it is highly unlikely that Andropov will have to pay the political price for the affair.

7. If one or more of the postulated personnel changes were to occur, what would be their international and domestic impact? If they were to follow the historical Soviet pattern of coming very late after the event, say over six months, the international impact would be minimal. If, however, the ousters were to come before the end of the year the political equation could change. Although they would almost certainly not be publicly attributed to the KAL affair, there would be calculated Soviet leaks designed to ensure that the West would think of them as being linked to that tragedy and as expressing Andropov's dissatisfaction with the way it was handled. The exact impact would then vary according to the individual or individuals dismissed:

- Zamyatin's departure would have no effect on Soviet policy, would be seen as an admission that the propaganda effort was poor, and would have little, if any, impact on international opinion.
- Koldunov's dismissal would also have no effect on Soviet policy but would be seen as reflecting Andropov's dissatisfaction with the military's "triggerhappiness" and evidence of his attempt to tame the military "hawks". It would, therefore, serve Andropov well.

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-- Gromyko's demise would naturally have the greatest impact domestically and internationally. Based on our current knowledge of leadership politics, this maneuver could only be initiated - directly or indirectly - by Andropov. Whether the turnover affected only Gromyko's Foreign Ministry job or his other posts as well, it could lead to greater agility in Soviet tactics but would not result in any fundamental change in Soviet policy. Internationally, the change would most likely be seen as an implicit rejection of Gromyko's handling of the KAL affair; and it would almost certainly result in more effective public relations efforts. To maximize this effect, Andropov would probably pick as Gromyko's successor some smooth Ambassador with recent experience in the West. Besides bringing a new flair to Soviet diplomacy, this type of Foreign Minister would have numerous western contacts who would advertise their connection and most likely feel protective toward the efforts of their newly prominent Soviet acquaintance. Andropov's choice would also tell us something about his priorities. The selection of Dobrynin would suggest a concentration on influencing the U.S. while the selection of a West European Ambassador (say Vorontsov in Paris, Semenov in Bonn, or even the widely experienced INF negotiator Kvitsinsky) would suggest a continuation of the current emphasis of trying to use Western Europe as a lever against the US. But, no matter who is chosen, the net result is likely to be a more velvety glove over the mailed fist.

8. To sum up, there is only tenuous circumstantial evidence pointing to the possibility of the changes discussed here. But there also appears to be enough ground and incentive for Andropov to want to make them. If he made one or more of them, and particularly if he dismissed both Gromyko and Koldunov, the impact on international and public opinion could be substantial. That option may therefore be tempting for Andropov and will remain open to him at least until he goes beyond his condemnation of the U.S. and becomes explicitly associated with the shoot down and its aftermath.

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